

Start Strong Council Task Force Meetings

John Tyler Community College

September 20, 2006

10AM – 3PM

Secretary Morris welcomed task force members and reminded members of the importance of their work. Secretary Morris has recommended task force chairs have a meeting with Council Chair, Katherine Busser, next week. At that meeting chairs will present the work of the task forces and discuss preliminary recommendations that will be brought to the full Council meeting on October 4.

Dr. Morris then spoke on the four Start Strong Discussion Sessions held in Norfolk, Roanoke, Richmond and Abingdon during the week of September 11. Feedback from all sessions was overwhelming positive. Parent education and outreach was a recurring theme among participants. More importantly, participants were anxious to know all the details, and were happy to hear their opinions were taken into account. Other recurring concerns included desire to know when the program will begin, if transportation would be provided, how it will serve special needs children, if the program would be inclusive, the extent of SOL focus at this level if any, and the concern of private providers and the financial impact if they lose the business of four year olds. Participants were reassured that their opinions were wanted and that all concerns would be taken into account and addressed as we move forward to provide a quality pre-k system in the Commonwealth. Two remaining sessions are scheduled in Fairfax on September 28 and Harrisonburg on September 29.

Dr. Morris gave an update on the progress of each task force. The **Governance Task Force** has reviewed governance structures in other states, the status of pre-k in Virginia and is assessing leadership at the state and local level. The **Standards Task Force** has defined pre-k at five different levels (community, program, classroom, child, family). The group is currently working on curriculum/learning standards, environmental factors, instructional assessment, evaluation and monitoring, program development/teacher qualifications and in the area of comprehensive/support services in order to develop both long and short term goals. The **Public Engagement Task Force** is working to identify possible partners, from both the bottom up through a grass roots network and from the top down with the use of high profile champions. The task force is also identifying potential stakeholders and how to identify messages for each target audience. **Professional Development** heard a presentation on quality of interactions vs. structural quality at the previous meeting and came to three conclusions. First, core competencies from AP should drive professional development of Start Strong teachers. Second, a mechanism is needed to organize professional development in a coordinated, consistent way across settings. And third, QRS should be implemented as structure for assessing and promoting quality. In addition, the group is working on recommendations for development of training programs and setting qualifications for a Start Strong workforce. The last task force, **Finance**, continues to work on investing in training for new and current teachers, reducing obstacles such as the local match, developing strategies for middle-class participation and proposing pilot programs in areas such as QRS, evaluation, blending of programs and funding streams, participation of private sites for pre-k and after school care, teacher training partnerships, and funding for local council development.

After outlining the work of the groups, Dr. Morris tasked the council with finalizing draft preliminary recommendations. To assist with this drafted language based on the first meeting, regional feedback and discussion with chairs has been distributed.

At this time, Dr. Morris introduced **Kathy Glazer** who spoke on the Alignment Project. A number of task forces are discussing pieces of the Alignment Project so task members were briefed on the full initiative. Components of the Alignment Project include: Benchmarks for Smart Beginnings, Early Learning Program Standards, Professional Competencies for Smart Beginnings, and a Career Lattice for Professional Development.

In discussing the Benchmarks for Smart Beginnings, members were concerned about how this would be rolled out and how it would get into the hands of parents. Members also suggested to perhaps include information in the new parent tool kit on the initiative.

Nonetheless, all four documents will help us address early learning as a seamless continuum across learning environments and craft a voluntary quality rating system.

A Quality Rating System (QRS) is means of assessing and rating the quality of an early childhood program – whether in a child care or preschool setting, public or private. Various features of quality are factored into the rating – including level of education of teachers and aides, physical environment of the classroom, materials and resources, management practices, and most importantly, the quality of interaction between the teacher and child. The rating is then displayed often as a 5-star scale. For those programs that voluntarily participate in the QRS – no matter where they are on the scale, a mentor/coach helps them develop a quality improvement plan and provides the technical assistance to help along this path. As programs achieve the next quality level, financial incentives are awarded.

Benefits of a strong QRS include:

1. A great consumer education tool for parents and is an at a glance way to recognize the quality of a program.
2. Effective marketing tool for programs to promote their high quality services.
3. Means of getting many programs in diverse setting on a quality improvement path, and establishes a structure for financial incentives targeted to qualify.
4. Market based approach that gets us out of regulatory discussions that have not been productive in terms of impacting quality.
5. Of most significance, this provides us a smart way to determine which private programs may be eligible to hold Start Strong pre-k classes.

Draft documents for the Alignment Project are already in place and readers/reviewers are currently completing their work. A final draft should be complete by the end of October. At that time discussion will begin on methods to share and educate the citizenry of these documents.

At this time members reported to their respective task forces. The five task forces (Standards, Public Engagement, Professional Development, Governance, and Finance) met from 11AM-3PM. Notes from each group are reported.

Standards Task Force:

Members in attendance included Mavis Brown; Jeane Chase, Nancy Moga, Jeff Caruso, John Morgan, Mary Lynn White, Badiyah Wajiid, Novella Ruffin, Kathy Massie, Scott Kizner, Cheryl Strobel, Angela Smith, Lola McDowel, Elizabeth Crawford and Kendall Tyree as Staff.

Renee Dino reviewed the charge and emphasized the need to know exactly why we decide the way we do on various recommendations. She reviewed recommendations, as addressed from the last meeting, could include:

1. Working with the Alignment Project to adopt a set of program standards that is consistent or appropriate across both public and private settings.
2. Adopting a voluntary quality rating system for pre-k programs.
3. Supporting information systems that collect data and gather program outcome information.

John Morgan asked of the relation and difference between program standards and a Quality Rating System. Kathy Massie mentioned that QRS would have program standards and license standards among others that would be adopted. This would also include a training component. It is a comprehensive system and program standards is merely a part of QRS.

Nancy Moga asked who gives the QRS rating. Kathy Massie, stated that it is up to how we formulate the process, be it a state agency or outside group. Renee Dino stated that we have hired Anne Mitchell in order to help develop a QRS in Virginia.

Renee Dino, asked members to divide into small groups and discuss the article, “Pathways to Early School Success – Effective Preschool Curricula and Teaching Strategies.” Members were asked to discuss the following sections:

- Setting the Context
- Stretching the Early Education Paradigm
- Expanding Knowledge Base and Role of Local Level Leadership
- Take Home Message, Implications and Recommendations

During a working lunch, members continued working in small groups and Kathy Glazer reported on the QRS to small groups explaining in more depth and fielding questions.

In discussing the article reviewed by small group’s members stressed the importance of teacher child interaction as key to quality programming. The article also stressed that teachers with advanced degrees didn’t necessarily ensure there was going to be a quality program in place. In addition, other points of interest mentioned included a concern for limited language proficiency and how a large number of children are at risk by virtue of income. The overall quality of programs is often poor and those that need the most are usually getting lowest quality. As a result of the article’s research members agreed great focus would be needed on curriculum and teaching strategies. Members also stated that the article noted a teacher with a bachelor’s degree with specialized training leads to better outcomes for children. As the group looks at components within a QRS, members must decide if a bachelor’s degree should stand alone or be in conjunction with an evaluation of one’s interaction with students.

Members quoted the author’s remark , “Overall there is still inconclusive research and more data needed before knowing if having a BA results in better outcomes but the importance of teachers knowledgeable about early childhood development does seem clear,” noting its importance and truth.

The group decided that as standards are developed, that a developmental approach and look at the whole child is taken.

Areas of concern that remain included the possibility of leaving behind our kids of most need. Members though were most confident we can build in quality that will have an impact on most needed kids and by extension all kids. Cheryl Strobel even provided a possible framework on implementing such a system. She offered Oklahoma by example. Over 20 years, Oklahoma is now serving 70% of 4 year olds. This incremental approach could be a model for the Commonwealth.

In addition, members wanted to make sure focus would not solely be on the teacher but that administrators would receive necessary training as well.

Renee distributed copies of the Early Learning Guidelines. This document will help serve as a road map. At this time members took a few minutes to review and discuss preliminary recommendations.

Discussion centered on the importance of that task force in monitoring the BOE Pre-K Committee as they work on curriculum. One of components to the grant is to develop a curriculum rubric which can be used by localities. Cheryl Strobel, member of the task force and pre-k committee, can help monitor these actions.

Members also agreed upon the importance of working with the Evaluation Task Force once established. Members agreed that assessment should not be standardized based. Novella Ruffin expressed concern on the method of assessments and the definite need for multiple methods agreeing standardized alone would be a poor decision.

Final recommendations from the Council are reported:

A. Working with Alignment Project, adopt a set of program standards that is consistent or appropriate across both public and private settings. (SSC Standards Task Force and SSC)

- 1.Ensure that standards address integration of existing program standards including those in VPI and Head Start.

- 2.Ensure that standards promote consistent use of transition (into pre-k and out of pre-k) practices between learning settings.
- 3.Work with Board of Education pre-K committee to develop curriculum recommendations.
- 4.Work with Professional Development Task Force to determine staff qualifications and professional development requirements.
- 5.Work with Evaluation Task Force to develop evaluation criteria and mechanisms for measuring, improving, monitoring, and reporting outcomes. Ensure child assessment and program monitoring are required components of all Start Strong pre-k programs.

B. Adopt a voluntary quality rating system for preschool programs based on AP products that addresses staff qualifications and classroom interactions, curriculum, leadership and other program and facility considerations. Ensure that QRS provides mechanisms for quality assessment, monitoring and improvement. (SSC / Gov / budget)

C. Support information systems to track data collection and reporting on programs, program quality, and outcomes. (SSC Finance Task Force)

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Finance Task Force:

Members in attendance included Mike Harreld, Chair; J. Cobb, Jim Duty, Gordon Gentry, Sherman LaPrade, Mamie Locke, Mike Ludwick, Cassandra Peters, Dan Sleeper, Eleanor Smalley; and Judy Heiman, Staff.

The task force recommends that the Governor establish a goal and timeline for implementation of Start Strong Pre-K Program:

Start Strong will provide quality preschool education through a diverse mix of public and private early childhood education providers to all Virginia children whose parents choose to enroll them by September 2011.

Discussion: it is important to lay out the vision for where we are headed, to serve as the context for the incremental steps we will propose in the short term. There is no science to the five year time frame. Ten years feels too long from the perspective of keeping people engaged.

The task force identified the elements that will have to be in place to meet that goal:

- Planning, implementation and evaluation
 - Voluntary quality rating system to identify and improve quality of programs.
 - Development of local councils
 - Outcomes evaluation methods
 - A good grasp of existing programs and funding streams

- Adequate funding to meet quality standards, with the same standards and resources for all programs whether they are in public or private settings
- A system of professional development to ensure supply of high quality teachers and staff, including support for development of instructional programs, scholarships, and ongoing training
- Ancillary services such as transportation and after-school care
- Public awareness activities
- Incentives/assistance for middle-income families
- Pilot programs that are substantial enough to generalize and diverse enough to test multiple models of program delivery.

Additional comments from discussion:

- Some superintendents are concerned that Start Strong, especially with participation of private providers, will compete with efforts to gain funding for full-day kindergarten in those divisions that still only offer half-day K. Consider having the funding follow the child, to move the discussion away from which “system” is losing or gaining.
- There are existing models for quality programs. We need to see what we can learn from those models about the costs of quality. Consider inviting representatives from quality programs to a future meeting to discuss the components of quality from a cost perspective.
- We need examples from other states of efforts to include those who are not generally considered income-eligible. Staff will chase down for next meeting.

Drawing from the discussion above, staff has drafted the following recommendations for the task force to present to the Council:

1. Identify all public funding streams supporting early childhood education and care, and recommend improved utilization of such funds in a coordinated system. (Governor’s Working Group)
2. Support training for new teachers, partnering with community colleges, four-year colleges and other providers of education and training as appropriate. This may involve addressing licensure issues. (Staff to refine proposal for inclusion in Governor’s budget in collaboration with Professional Development Task Force)
3. Determine adequate funding level to support quality. Funding should support parity across public and private settings. (SSC Finance Task Force / staff)
4. Develop strategies to mitigate the impact of local match requirements for localities where this is an obstacle to implementation of programs and full utilization of state allocations. Examples may include exempting pre-K from local match requirements, using a formula other than the composite index, or phasing in the requirement to meet the match so that localities can work up to full matching over a few years. (SSC/Gov/ Leg)
5. Fund pilot programs testing multiple aspects of program development and delivery:
 - a. Voluntary quality rating system
 - b. Blending of programs with different funding streams (this is being done through Head Start, combining HS and VPI, but may not include additional funding streams such as child care subsidy)
 - c. Delivery in mixed (public and private) sites
 - d. Expansion of eligibility using various individual or community risk criteria
 - e. Coordinating pre-K in schools and private sites with after-school care in private sites

- f. Course/program development, teacher training and ways to increase throughput, perhaps by partnering with private providers
 - g. Local council-designated pilots within a range of specified priorities and quality requirements
6. Develop strategies to help those families that cannot afford quality care but do not qualify for existing federal and state funded programs. Consider various subsidies and incentives, such as sliding scale tuition, tax deductions and credits. (SSC Finance Task Force)
 7. Support information systems to track data collection and reporting on programs, program quality, and outcomes. (SSC Finance Task Force)

Governance Task Force:

Members in attendance included Judith Rosen; Chair, Fred Morton, Darlene Burcham, Anne Goldstein, Deborah Jonas, Audrey Davidson, Ken Plum, Mary Hynes, Toni Cacace-Bashears, Jennie Moline; Staff, Doug Garcia; Staff, and Kate Paris; Staff.

Kate Paris presented the following overview of existing funding and programs for preschool in Virginia.

| Program Name | Purpose | # of 4 year olds served | Population Served | Funding | Funding Control Source | Agency administering the program |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| Virginia Preschool Initiative | To provide programs for at-risk four year old children | 11,234 | Four-year-olds who are at-risk for school failure and not presently receiving services from Head Start | In 2005-2006 \$46.6 million was appropriated for VPI with \$38.5 million (83%) of the funds being used based on actual enrollment. There is also a local match based on a local ability to pay. | DOE and local match | DOE |
| Licensing in Virginia | To license preschool providers | There are currently 2,573 licensed child care centers and 3,692 family child care homes in Virginia | Preschools, child care centers | N/A | N/A | DSS |
| Title I Preschool | To serve at risk kids within the school division | 4,419 | Title I eligible children | \$216,517,554 | Federal (can be coordinated with other programs) | DOE |
| Child Care and Development Fund | Assists low-income families, families | 7,726 | 82% of total children served are in licensed facilities in | In FY 2005, Virginia received \$17,777,350 from the federal | Federal (can be combined with other | DSS |

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|--------------------------|---|---|--|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance in obtaining child care so they can work or attend training/education | | Virginia | government under CCDF. There was a 50% state match creating a total of \$35,554,701 in CCDF in Virginia. | programs) | |
| Head Start | Provides services to promote academic, social and emotional development for income-eligible families. | 12,453 three and four year olds are served in 54 different programs in Virginia | Birth to 5 eligible children based on the federal poverty guidelines | \$98 million plus a 20% local match (\$24 million in cash and/or in-kind donations) | Federal + local match | Federal and local grantee |
| Special Education | All school divisions and some hospital programs serve special education children from 2 through 5 years old. | 18,500 2 - 5 year old children being served for the 2005-06 school year | Special educational needs children from ages 2 to 5 | \$9,125,517 for IDEA Part B with \$6 million going to the school districts and the remaining going towards technical assistance and training | Federal | DOE |

Questions still to be answered included: (1.) How many 4 year olds are served by programs that are licensed? (2.) How many 4 year olds are served by CCDF? Title I? IDEA funding? Head Start? (3.) How much money comes to Virginia from CCDF and Title I funds? (4.) What are the additional funding sources for Special Education preschool?

At this time, Doug gave an overview of Governance structures for other states.

Questions still to be answered included: (1.) What is the percentage of 4 year olds served by states that have pre-K programs? (2.) How does that percentage differ from the percentage served before a statewide program was instituted?

The group discussed the possibility of giving some grants for technical assistance, professional development, etc.

Delegate Plum stated some principles that the group generally agreed on. Accountability/ Voluntary and Market Driven Quality Rating System are key. There should be an Early Childhood Education “Czar” who sits in the Governor’s office and is responsible for overseeing and assisting early childhood initiatives. Kathy Glazer could easily be considered already in this capacity.

Additionally, the group discussed grants for local planning groups. Members decided that a local match should not be required and that grants should be for planning. There was some discussion as to what was meant by “locality.” One member suggested that Planning Districts be used and other members suggested that the applicants decide.

Jennie and Doug will send out a list of recommended members for local advisory groups and members will respond with their thoughts on who should be required on the committee. Staff will also find out answers to the questions posed.

Public Engagement Task Force:

Members of the group brainstormed a number of arguments for and against a Start Strong program. This provided message ideas to include or avoid in working through the targeted audiences piece. This chart is below.

| TARGET | VALUES OR INTERESTS | KEY MESSAGES FOR THEM | WHAT WE WANT THEM TO DO | EFFECTIVE CHANNELS OR CONTACTS | STRATEGIES AND METHODS |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTA Past recipients of VPI Junior League Working parents | Safe place/dependable affordable Nurturing environment print rich environment activity-music, art, play Close readiness gap School ready Don't want baby sobs Greater opportunities Create love of learning | Make the place they are a good place for kids Safe, secure, reliable all settings would be quality settings parent friendly climate preparing healthy, happy learners the price child care provided-before and after “Learning is Child’s Play” | PTA :actively engage their members and citizens in their communities Put on agenda at PTA meetings Get engaged Become advocates Contact legislators | Need state PTA buy-in Local PTA leaders Other kid friendly community organizations Faith based groups | PTA/others: hold community events Work with other groups/form coalition to engage parents and others Work with local media, radio, TV to get message out Use local businesses to post fliers, hand out materials (where do parents go?) |
| Business Leaders | Educated workforce Less parent absenteeism More productive employees Happier workers | Sound investment Retain employees Attract new business Preparing for the future Economic common sense Can't afford any throw aways | Become knowledgeable and engaged Be the champions Get issue in front of all local chambers/rotary clubs/Kiwanis/other local business groups Use their influence to bring others on board Visit pre-school sites-public and private | Local chamber leaders Other business associations While not business-local police, fire and EMS personnel should be involved as well. These are organized groups and usually parents. | Build a local community coalition Engage the media Write editorials Host a luncheon-invite local leaders, political and civic-discuss the business perspective of early childhood education Issue “call to action” What is it that people can do to further the cause? |
| Faith community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural | | | | | |
| Private child care providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centers • FCC Homes | Quality program Compensation and benefits Consistency in staff and training Not interested in academic (SOL) focus Do not want to lose 4 year olds Make accessible and available to all Options for parents Fear of illegal immigrants getting most of slots Should include center and home based | Quality will be rewarded They are important in the process-will not lose autonomy Resources What's best for kids | Identify their needs Become partners with the public side to advance the issue Be at the table Discuss with parents Be part of community forums Activist role | Provider Associations VAECE- VaAssoc. Early Childhood Educators VAFCC- VaAssoc. Family Child Care (providers?) VDSS-local dss CSB- Community Service Bds Healthy Families Churches United Way- Success by 6 USDA- CACFP-child and adult care food program | Establish local level working groups Presentations at local associations/groups meetings Study existing models (speakers' bureau) Letters to editor Ultimately-each locality must have strong local control with flexibility. Should require a % of private providers in the plan |
| Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newspapers • Public TV • Radio | | | | | |
| Legislators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key committees • Republicans (House of Delegates) • Republicans (Senate) • Others | | | | | |
| Coalitions | | | | | |
| Northern Virginia | | | | | |

For-equality of educational opportunities, economic return/investment, intelligent workforce, strengthen support for families, quality curriculum-benchmarks will be set for all providers-both public and private, quality teachers, schools rather than "prisons", cut down on retention rates, everyone will start at a level playing field, quality rating system, accountability-positive outcomes we can measure.

Against-private providers will be against, government trying to tell "parents" what to do, not enough "bang" for the buck, do not want pre-K "sol" type curriculum, will not address the "whole child"-emotional, social, etc. levels, will increase tax rates, no data from "existing" programs.

Members worked in small groups on targeted audiences' piece (attached). They did not select legislators as an initial target audience. The group felt that a public engagement campaign must start with others who will then engage and influence legislators. The task force was not able to complete all target audiences due to time and fewer members present.

Recommendations from the task force:

1. Must have some reasonable amount of data from local school divisions on existing pre-k programs.
 2. Survey parents to determine what their needs and interests might be.
 3. Need to engage leaders of additional organizations at state level-PTA, VSBA and others.
 4. Develop strategies and materials to inform targeted audiences.
 5. Conduct focus groups to gain understanding of concerns and issues of potential opponents.
 6. Create informational materials highlighting importance of early childhood education.
 7. Hire a PR firm to do statewide ad campaign.
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Professional Development Task Force:

Draft Recommendations include:

- A. Work with Alignment Project and Board of Education Committee on Preschool to develop a list of required professional competencies for preschool teachers, administrators and teaching assistants based on the early learning benchmarks. Review existing competencies for preschool teacher licenses to ensure that they include key elements identified for preschool personnel. (SSC)
- B. Work with the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure (ABTEL) and the Board of Education to develop recommendations regarding the appropriate age and grade ranges for teacher licenses in the pre-K and early elementary years. If recommendations do not coincide with current licensure ranges, develop proposal for new early childhood license(s). (SSC)
- C. Conduct a pilot study using interaction-based teacher assessment and professional development in publicly-funded preschool programs. (Gov / budget)
- D. Conduct a pilot study on the use of a voluntary quality ratings system for quality assessment, monitoring and improvement, with the professional competencies of preschool personnel as a major component of the quality rating. (Gov / budget)
- E. Adopt a professional development lattice tying competencies, formal education, licensure or certification, and type of position to clarify the relationship among these elements and provide a basis for workforce analysis and planning. (SSC)
- F. Work with DSS, community colleges, four-year colleges and other professional development providers to create appropriate education and training programs aligned with competencies, professional development lattice and licensure/certification requirements. (GWG)
- G. Identify all public funding streams supporting training for providers of early childhood education and care (including scholarship programs), and recommend improved utilization and expansion of such funding in a coordinated system to provide and track professional development. (GWG)

H. Develop a recruitment program for the Start Strong workforce with incentives for teachers who are highly qualified to commit to a certain period of time in pre-K classrooms, especially those in high-need or rural areas. (SSC Finance Task Force)

I. Support salary/benefit parity between Start Strong workforce and public school teachers. (SSC Finance Task Force)

All task force meetings concluded at 3PM. Recommendations will be presented at the next full meeting of the Start Strong Council on October 4, 2006 at 10AM at the Capital One, West Creek Campus location.